

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM**  
**CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN**



**NEWS RELEASE**

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**House Approves Davis Amendment Creating  
Landmark D.C. School Choice Program**

**Washington, D.C.** – The U.S. House of Representatives today approved legislation providing families and children in the District of Columbia with enhanced educational choices. The legislation, offered as an amendment to the FY2004 D.C. Appropriations Act by Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA), Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH) and D.C. Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), will expand opportunities for students in under-performing D.C. elementary and secondary schools.

Final passage of the overriding D.C. appropriations bill was postponed until next week.

The District of Columbia has one of the most troubled public school systems in the United States. School choice offers hope to parents and students by giving them the opportunity to select a school that meets their educational needs, while the competition school choice brings *will improve the overall educational atmosphere* for the parents, teachers and administrators who continue to work to improve the public school system.

Following are excerpts from Davis' floor speech on the amendment:

*"This amendment can make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of low-income children. It represents a shot at a better education and, in turn, a better life.*

*"The condition of D.C. Public Schools has concerned me since the first day I came to Congress as Chair of the D.C. Subcommittee. While we've made strides since then, the quality of educational opportunities in the Nation's Capital should continue to worry us all.*

*"One thing is clear: too many children in our Nation's capital are not getting the education they need and deserve. Lower-income families concerned about the quality and safety of their children in District of Columbia public schools should not have to resign themselves to sending their children to under-performing schools where students are not adequately motivated to perform.*

*"Over the past decade, Congress has spent considerable time and resources working with the District to reform its education system. But the ability of D.C. schools*

*to meet key performance goals has long been plagued by financial mismanagement and a host of other problems. Despite concerted efforts by local officials to improve the public school system, little evidence of progress in improving academic performance is available.*

*“I have traditionally opposed federal dollars going to private schools because I think federal dollars ought to be targeted to public schools. But, for the District, I think we have to ask this question: wouldn’t more choices funded by new federal dollars provide a needed alternative for low-income children attending low-performing schools? After hearing from D.C. Mayor Tony Williams and Council Member Kevin Chavous and School Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz – all Democrats, I might add -- I’ve come to the conclusion that parents and students stuck in failing schools deserve an opportunity to choose from a wider pool.*

*“I’ve received calls from parents who are frustrated, angry, even distraught by the condition of their child’s school. These parents have attended our hearings. They danced and wept when the Government Reform Committee approved school choice legislation.*

*“Mr. Speaker, it’s time to do more than sympathize. This is a moral imperative. The school choice debate should not be about politics. It should be about an honest appraisal of the state of affairs in our public schools, about offering an alternative for students and parents. What is being proposed is not a mandate but a choice.*

*“The goal of school choice in the District of Columbia is addition, not subtraction. We all want the District’s education system to improve, and this is at the very least a short-term effort to do something about it. The fact is, the monopoly of D.C. Public Schools is harming D.C. children. It’s time to shake up that monopoly.*

*“Enhancing educational quality in the District is a critical component of maintaining the positive momentum we’ve seen in recent years under the stewardship of Mayor Williams and the Council. It is our duty to provide resources so that kids can have a brighter future. Is this the panacea to all that plagues public education in the District? Of course not. But it’s a significant step in the right direction, and hopefully one that will not be needed indefinitely.”*

The legislation approved today will offer parents **up to \$7,500** in scholarship funds for children to attend a private elementary or high school in Washington, D.C. Other details of the legislation include:

- All funding for the scholarship programs comes from new funds, therefore no public, private or charter school will be drained of any funds.
- As research has shown, the competition provided by school choice benefits both the private and public schools, by creating an atmosphere of high expectations and a climate of education achievement.
- The maximum amount of each scholarship is \$7,500. However, because the scholarships will be awarded based on need and the tuition and fees of the new school, not all students will receive the maximum amount.

- A total of \$10 million is authorized for the program in the first year.
- Grant money is distributed to various non-profit organizations and D.C. government agencies that must apply to the U.S. Department of Education and demonstrate to the Secretary how they will recruit students, find participating schools and ensure that funds are used properly.
- Priority is given to low-income students in low-performing schools, as identified by the No Child Left Behind Act.
- Eligible students must be residents of the District of Columbia, and their family income cannot exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Priority is also given to programs that provide the widest variety of educational options to children of various ages and grade levels.
- Scholarship funds can be used to cover the costs of tuition, fees and transportation.
- Participating schools may not discriminate based on race, color, national origin or gender. However, religious schools are allowed to maintain their character through their employment practices and schools that offer single-gender classes or programs may participate.
- The Secretary is required to conduct an evaluation of the program's progress and submit an annual and a final report to Congress. Each grantee must submit an annual report to the Secretary regarding its activities and the academic achievement of the students in the program. The Secretary will then prepare for Congress a report based on the information gathered from the grantees. Each grantee must ensure that the participating schools report to the parents to discuss their children's academic achievements at least once a year.

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